

George Washington Birthplace National Monument
General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement

Public Scoping Meeting, March 14, 2006
Summary of Comments

This summary was prepared from the compilation of comments and suggestions made at the public scoping meeting held at the A.T. Johnson School in Montross, Virginia on March 14. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the general management planning project at George Washington Birthplace NM and to gather input for the plan. Participants broke into small groups to discuss values, visions, suggestions for improvement, and obstacles relative to the Birthplace.

Attendees at the Public Meeting indicated that they value the Birthplace for its:

- natural setting, its peacefulness and serenity, including the lands that can be seen from the Birthplace
- beauty, including the Cedar Grove in particular and the park in general, as it is seen from neighboring areas
- diversity of natural resources, including wildlife, the nature trail, the beach
- diversity of visitor experience and interpretation, including the feeling of being in an historical place
- relationship to the life of George Washington, including direct and tangible links such as the burial ground, the house site, and the land itself
- opportunities for children and others to immerse themselves and learn about Colonial American life
- staff, volunteers and the people that care for and interpret the Birthplace all love what they do
- the visitors themselves and their reactions to what they find there, including international visitors, teachers from around the country, school groups, etc.
- low admission cost, and availability of activities that cannot be found elsewhere in the community, such as the picnic area and shelter, the beach area, the crafts area

Many attendees at the public meeting envision the future of the Birthplace as a way to better understand and relate to the early family history of George Washington and the influence that his ancestors and family might have had on his life. Ways to do this include utilizing living history, with demonstrations of daily activities of colonial farm life and especially programs of interest to children, schools and families

Many attendees expressed a concern about the importance of the setting, both to the experience of visiting the park and its relationship to understanding the early family history of George Washington. Many of the attendees indicated that:

- Great care needs to be taken to not overbuild within the park and to not lose sight of the focus on George Washington's early life and family history.
- Cooperative efforts were needed to preserve the rural and natural setting of the park, so that it can be incorporated into the interpretation of George's life and family history. The experience of getting to the park and how the setting influences the experience of being in the park were both recognized.
- Effort is needed to remove or screen existing elements that detract from the setting.

Many attendees would like the Birthplace to have more help in order to:

- maintain and care for the structures in the park
- fix the farm building to control predators
- control invasive plant and animal species

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- remove and replace downed trees
- fix and upgrade the bathrooms
- repair eroded areas
- keep and add new interpretive programs
- provide more demonstration activities
- re-introduce costumed interpretation
- conduct additional archeological research

Attendees strongly supported the need for an African-American and Native American presence, and to tell the stories about these cultures and how they interacted with other colonial era residents (including music, dance, etc.)

Most attendees recognized the importance of the relationship of the Birthplace to the community at large, especially:

- the relationship to other Washington sites such as Ferry Farm, Mount Vernon, Revolutionary War sites, etc.
- the relationship to Monroe's Birthplace, Stratford Hall, and other historic sites in the region, including understanding visitor use policies and making them more consistent from site to site.
- working with property owners on surrounding lands to develop and strengthen their sense of the legacy and heritage of the area, and to encourage property owners to consider voluntarily placing conservation easements on their properties as a way to maintain the legacy and rural heritage of the area

Most attendees understood that budget constraints make it difficult for NPS to maintain the park and to offer living history programs. To that end attendees suggested:

- developing an overall plan for volunteers that would include goals, long-range plans, and ways to support park maintenance and living history programs with volunteers.
- expanding the volunteer program, especially among new residents moving into the area
- extending the network of support to include the whole of the Northern Neck, working together to appreciate and celebrate the Birthplace
- expanding outreach to parents of school-age children, teachers, national charitable organizations, other George Washington sites, Kenmore, Bay-aging, Elder Hostel, etc.
- expanding communication about ongoing George Washington scholarship
- extending publicity further into Maryland and Virginia
- some attendees suggested doing more with what is already there, such as with the library, theater and gift shop, rather than expanding into new areas

Attendees identified the main obstacles to achieving their suggestions:

- funding and lack of staffing
- need for publicity and outreach, especially in metropolitan areas
- policies, decision-making processes, rules
- community attitudes
- lack of involvement with community and land use issues
- difficulty of addressing land use issues
- lack of interest and excitement